# The Joys of Camping: A Helluva Boss Fanfiction by QuaintCapp

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Summary:

(NOTE: This is a sequel to “Stranded Hound”, another Fanfiction I wrote which you can find on my profile.)

Loona had been doing well with life, dealing with Blitzo’s usual antics and tagging along to some jobs here and there with her dad and M&M, though as usual, she was relegated to office work which she didn’t mind too much anyhow; except for having to deal with the odd phone call which interrupted her from time to time. It had been a busy couple of weeks and Loona figured she needed a break from it all. Luckily for the hellhound, it was at last Friday which allowed her to relax more than usual. Luckily for her, Blitzo allowed for the hellhound to go where she wanted to her relief. After letting Blitzø know where she would be going to his (slight) approval, Loona made took some of her things for the weekend and left for a weekend-long trip; she was off to see an “old” friend of hers - one Jim Steele.

## Notes:

Hello again, this is QuaintCapp!

I've gone and done some more writing again after at last being inspired by a few ideas I had floating around which I wanted to include in previous fanfics. This is another Loona Fanfiction, something with a touch of slice-of-life added to which is the type of stuff I like writing about anyway. With Loona being a considerable recluse, you'd figure that something with a bit of isolation like camping would suit her.

Anyhow! I'll stop my ramblings; I hope you enjoy my latest bit of writing.

## Chapter 1

## Chapter Text

“Yeah, absolutely mate - I’ll get it all in for you by next week. … It’s a massive job, I know. Are you sure you don’t need my help? … Righto, if you’re confident. … No worries, I’ll see you around.”

Jim hung up the phone as he huffed, trying his best to figure out the logistics of a timber delivery; it was for a construction site that was being planned out of town, with the client in question emphasizing that no delay could be afforded, despite the fact that some of the timber cuts required needed to be custom-ordered from far down south in Tasmania. Sure, Jim had the means to deliver it, but Bloody Norah, the cost of it would be hefty!

For three days he had been thinking about this on top of everything else. The upside of this order was that it would pay very well; Three Thousand Dollars was the price they were willing to pay at the very least, so in all actuality, perhaps the struggle was worth it. Jim, however, figured he needed to cease worrying about it for the time-being; it was Friday, and the customer in question wasn’t expecting the delivery until late in the following week, therefore concluding that he had some downtime to himself.

For a little while now, Jim had considered going on a weekend-long camping trip. He had the means and the equipment needed; some well-kept old-fashioned tents he had collected over the past couple of years, some camping equipment like a torch and first-aid kit, outdoor cooking utensils, and so on.

First, however, this carpenter had to consider whether or not he

had anything else planned for the weekend. After concluding that he didn't, Jim concluded that this long-considered plan could become a reality, making his way to his garage to collect everything and throw it at the back of his Ute.

For the next ten minutes, Jim went around the garage and gathered everything he needed; canvas tent, cooking utensils, and of course, a map of the local area. Sure, he could use a GPS or his phone to navigate, but to him, that didn't seem authentic. Jim makes his way back outside after finding the map, needing the sunlight to examine the article more carefully compared to the gloominess of the garage.

For the next few minutes, Jim closely examines every little detail of the map, at last finding the spot he wanted to camp around in; "Coachman's Gully", which was a good thirty minutes drive from where he lived. Soon enough, Jim becomes unaware of his surroundings, perhaps hyper fixating on the intricate details of the article in his hands. As he did so, he thought of the logistics of such a trip; food, petrol, water, and what about-

"Whatcha got there?"

Jim gets a sudden shock, thrown out of his gaze by a familiar voice. He looks up from the map suddenly to find the all-too familiar hellhound standing next to him, leaning in slightly with mundane curiosity at the map gripped in his hands. On this occasion, Loona was wearing her usual crop-top, her accustomed black jacket and some long camouflage pants.

"Loona! Uff- Bloody hell, you scared the shit outta me," Jim exclaimed who held his free hand to his chest briefly, though nonetheless was pleasantly surprised.

This admission prompted Loona to cackle heartily who found his fright quite amusing: “What? A big bastard like you getting frightened? You’re not going soft, are you,” the hellhound teased with a smirk, though it was without malicious intention.

Jim briefly threw up his hand in dismissal as he folded the map away in his hands. Loona shifted her gaze back at the paper in his hands and asked again; “You haven’t answered my question; whatcha got there,” the hellhound repeated, leaning in to see it.

“Nothing, just a map,” Jim explained before sliding it in the camping bag he had with him; “I was going to head off to camp for the weekend, but seeming that you’re here-”

“What? “Seeming that I’m here?”,” Loona repeated; “Well, fuck, what if I wanted to try it out?”

Jim, who was about to store the bag at the back of his vehicle, turned back towards Loona; “Did you want to? I’ve got a spare canvas tent and all.”

Loona shrugs; “Eh, I don’t see why not. Whereabouts were you planning on going?”

“It’s this little place called “Coachman’s Gully,” not too far from here, about a half-hour’s drive,” Jim informed the hellhound as he retrieved the spare canvas tent and threw it in the back of the Ute; “There’s a river that runs through there; I was thinking of maybe camping next to it. From what I’ve heard, there’s some interesting things up there I wanted to check out for myself.”

Loona raises her brow in mild interest, considering the prospect of something interesting happening. Sure, it may sound borderline, well, “boring”, but it’d be something new; “Sounds alright, I guess. Screw it, might as well try it out,” Loona conceded.

“No worries,” Jim replied as he packed away the rest of his camping gear; “I’ll just chuck this at the back, then we’ll-”

Just before he could finish his sentence, Jim’s phone began blaring in his pocket. Without hesitation, Jim pulls it out of his pocket and answers the call:

“Sorry, Loona, gotta answer this one. Hello? … Ah, dad, how’s it going? … Yeah not too bad, either. What’s up? … I’ll be heading through there either way, so I might as well- oh! Hey, you don’t mind if I bring a mate over as well? … Alright, no worries, I’ll see you in an hour. … Yeah, catch you on.”

“Wait, what,” Loona asks, “Where are we going now?”

“Nowhere, just got to go see my folks for a moment; we’re heading through that way, anyway,” Jim replies as he heads back into his house to get some canned food for the trip, Loona following behind; “Did you feel like meeting them?”

Loona hesitates as she helps herself to a glass of water, thinking on the proposal; “Not sure, to be honest with you. If they’re nice, then I guess. I’m pretty shit at socializing, you know?”

Jim acknowledges Loona’s conviction about herself, but at the same

time refutes it; “You’re too harsh on yourself, mate; you’re good at socializing from what I’ve seen. You talk to me just fine,” he points out as he packs away some canned braised steak and onion as well as some bread rolls.

“Yeah, but that’s because I’m used to talking to you and I know you well enough to trust you,” Loona admits after finishing her glass of water and discarding the glass in the sink; “But- dammit, you already said I was coming, so… you know what? Fuck it, I’ll come see them. I’ll try my best.”

Jim acknowledges this with an understanding smile; “You know, you don’t have to force yourself to talk to people if you don’t want to,” he reassures the hellhound as he closes the small box now full of canned food.

“I know, I know,” Loona responds as she chews on a bit of ham she found with Jim’s permission to eat it; “But- well, you’ve done so much for me, so this is the least I can do in return. I know I can be an asshole at times, but hey, I’m the least asshole-ish to you,” Loona half jokes as she takes a last-minute photo of the horizon as a memento.

Jim chuckles a little bit; “Hah, well, I appreciate that.”

Loona goes to sit down on the couch for the moment as Jim continues to search his house in case he needs anything else, picking up everything from spare batteries, a bag of firewood he had bought from the hardware store a couple days prior, and a pair of fingerless gloves just in case. Loona, meanwhile, takes in the usual cozy atmosphere of his living room. She rested the bag that she had bought, containing some of her own stuff she needed next

to her on the couch, making sure that it was properly closed in case anything fell out later on.

As she looks around the living room, she finds something near the flat-screen tv which caught her eye. It was a journal that had been left, one of the pages being left open. Out of curiosity, Loona finds herself approaching it, gently picking it up and examining the page that had been open on display. The hellhound proceeded to read the entry:

“I’ve been seeing Jenny recently. Saw her last week down in town. I swear she’s taken a shine to me, and I feel I’ve done so as well.”

Loona gently raises her brow and gives off a small smile to herself, finding the entry sweet. She was about to put the journal back in its place, but it was too late, as Jim noticed her reading it with curiosity. She spins around, unsure of what to say:

“Oh, shit- dude, I’m sorry, I- I was just-”

Jim laughs, putting his hand up to calm Loona down; “Hah- matey, don’t worry about it! You can read it, I don’t care. I see you’ve found out about Jenny, hey?”

Loona closes the journal up and puts it back down, still a tad bit ashamed of reading his personal stuff; “Y-yeah, I have. Apologies, dude, I got curious. Who is she, if I can ask?”

Jim smiles gently before beginning as he swung a bag over his shoulder, pretty much ready to head off; “Oh, just a woman I knew from high school. She’s been seeing me on and off, but we don’t see each other too often. She’s got a spark, you know,” Jim explains,

with it now obvious to Loona that this “Jenny” was ever-so close to Jim’s heart.

The hellhound laughs softly, finding it adorable; “Look at you, Jim; a big, burly bastard, all weak over a little woman,” she teases with a smirk.

“Oh, can it,” Jim retorts, grinning in slight embarrassment; “What about you? You got anyone you’re chasing?”

Loona scoffs; “Me? Nah, not anymore I don’t think. I’ve got friends and associates; that’s enough for me.”

The man who now donned his accustomed broadbrim hat acknowledged her response with a simple “yeah, nah, I getcha”, before once again returning to the garage with the bag. Loona was left alone in the house for a brief period of time, giving her the opportunity to re-explore her former place of refuge with a nostalgic familiarity. She found another personal memento of Jim’s, this time much more “public” and hanging up on a wall.

The photo contained a younger version of Jim, perhaps in his early teenage years, with presumably his mother and father, as well as a slightly taller boy who looked similar to Jim, which was presumably Paul, Jim’s brother. She examined the two taller figures:

Jim’s mother was a shorter type of lady with small glasses that hung on the bridge of her small nose, with rich brown hair that waved and stretched no further down than just above her shoulders. She wore a moderate gray shirt and a long prussian-blue skirt, stretching down to her ankles, her attire complete with a pair of rich-brown boots, which reminded Loona of Jim’s own in terms of color.

Jim's father was a taller, stockier bloke, with broad shoulders and a grizzled, yet kind face. His black hair was shorter, swept back and parted to the left of his forehead. He wore a worn dark-green buttoned-up shirt and a pair of black trousers, complete with a pair of black Williams Boots; at least now Loona knew where this "hillbilly", as Blitz kept describing Jim as to her annoyance, got his quite smart yet simplistic fashion sense from. Loona carefully examined their facial expressions; although this was just a family picture, they seemed happy and welcoming, almost humble. "Maybe meeting them wouldn't be so bad after-all," Loona thought to herself, finding reassurance in this presumption.

Jim finally returned to the house, finding Loona looking at his family photo with an intrigued look in her scarlet eyes. He clears his throat so as not to interrupt his friend with any rude intention; "So, nah, yeah; you felt like heading off yet?"

Loona turns her attention towards Jim who was standing in the hallway with his hands entangled behind his back; "Sure, just let me turn into my human guise; your folks don't want to see a big, hairy beast like me, now do they? They'll probably shit themselves much like you did."

Jim laughs heartily; "Haha! Nah, you got a point there! The Ute's parked outside, I'll be in there waiting," Jim informed the hellhound who nodded as she went to the spare bedroom to prepare herself for the weekend trip.

Not too long later, Loona, who was now human in appearance, left the house and locked the front door with a set of keys Jim had left for her. She briefly fixes up her hair with her hands as she sits in

the passenger's seat, besides Jim who had the car running, ready to head off.

"Hah! So many memories in this old thing, huh," Loona remarked as she closed the passenger's side door.

"Oh, don't get me started, matey," Jim chuckled as they finally pulled away from the front of the house, heading off to the main road.

The Ute made its way down the road, heading into town, more cars being seen as they made their way through, finally passing through the town centre.

"So," Jim begins his usual small talk; "How's things been?"

Loona laughs briefly; "Oh, you know, same old shit I have to deal with. Everyone's good and at their best; Blitz is still an asshole, and that Millie and Moxxie still love each other to bits; so yeah, nothing much has changed."

Jim grunts, acknowledging this mundane information as they pass through town, Loona briefly noticing one of the members of that gang of thugs that had tried something foolish on her a month or so prior. She glares at the young man with a deadeye look, hoping that he would notice her presence. Fortunately for Loona, the young man noticed her, stopping mid-walk and staring with brief fear in his eyes at the passing Ute, practically looking like he felt his life was almost over. Loona grins to herself, satisfied to have perhaps put that shitbag in his place.

The duo head in the north-west direction up to just before where the town ended and the open plains, rolling hills and bushland began. Jim made a small detour from the main road, pulling off into a quiet street with a few small houses. Towards the middle of the left-side of the street was a smaller house painted white, low to the ground with a balcony and a timber garage to its left to accompany it. This was the house that Jim pulled in front of, slowing the car to a stop and putting it in 'park'.

"Righto, this is it," Jim informed his passenger who was looking at it with mild interest.

"Hm," Loona simply responds, looking at it with a bit of hesitation to approach it. It wasn't as if she was nervous about the residents of the property itself, rather hesitant about having to socialize; as she mentioned earlier, she was usually poor at it, being naturally recluse and all that. Perhaps, though, Jim was right; she probably was being too harsh on herself.

"Hey, uh, you don't mind if I hold back a bit, and you go talk to them first," Loona requests as she continues to sit in the passenger's side with her door open; "Probably sounds really stupid, but I'm not ready just yet."

"Nah, no worries," Jim obliged as he got out and closed the driver's side door; "take as much time as you need."

Loona gives a slight thumbs-up as she watches him walk past the steel gate and up to the front door. Shortly after finally reaching the front door, he knocks on it to reveal his presence, which was then

answered a couple of seconds later by a shorter woman, probably in her late 50s with graying hair, opening the door to greet the visitor. The middle-aged woman, now obviously Jim's mother, bowed him down to her height and gently patted his cheek with perhaps the largest smile Loona had ever seen on somebody's face.

Although Loona was a fair distance away, she could make out small sections of the conversation being had, something along the lines of "how's Dad going" and where Jim's brother was at that time. The "human" continued to observe both mother and son conversing, still debating on whether or not to go up, still trying to find the motivation. This decision, however, was made up for her as Jim gestures to the Ute, obviously referring to his friend still sitting in the passenger's side.

"Oh- dammit, Jim," Loona whispers to herself, though relieved that she no longer had to make the choice herself.

The "human" huffs a little bit, gaining the motivation to go and socialize as she finally gets out of her seat and closes the door behind her. After being sure that she looked presentable, she at last snapped out of her hesitancy and made her way up.

"H-hello," Loona manages to say with a slightly forced smile, finally stopping at the front door in front of the mother and her son; "It's, uh, it's nice to meet you."

"Oh, and you must be this 'Loona' Jimmy here's been talking about," the middle-aged woman warmly responds with a smile, her voice slightly croaky due to her age; "It's nice to finally meet you, too. I do love the jacket, by the way," she adds, trying her best to make Loona feel welcome.

“O-oh- uh, thank you,” Loona responds, somewhat surprised at the compliment; she didn’t get too many of those, after-all, or at least genuine, benign ones like this; “I’m so sorry for being here, lady, I-”

“Oh, nonsense,” Jim’s mother interrupts, albeit without trying to be rude; “You’re fine! It’s nice to have people over, anyhow. Henry and I often get tired of the monotonous quiet, so it is lovely to see someone new once in a while!”

“Who is that, Catherine?,” a scruffy, booming voice calls from inside from presumably the living room.

“Just Jimmy and a visitor, Henry! Don’t be so rude and come out from there,” Catherine barks from the front door, her demeanor slightly more demanding, perhaps because Henry presumably was a lazy “pain-in-the-arse” at the best of times.

“Alright! Give me a minute,” Henry calls out from within the house as something sounds like it shifted from inside, perhaps a lounge chair.

Shortly after, slow and heavy footsteps could be heard on the wooden floorboards as a large shape emerged from behind the middle-aged lady. Soon enough, Henry, Jim’s father, emerged from the darkness of the home and into the morning sunlight, rubbing the back of his neck and cracking it, responding to it with a wince. On this occasion, the tall and hardened-looking middle-aged man was wearing a plaid blue shirt, a pair of baggy dark-blue trousers and a pair of beige work boots.

“Ah, Jimmy,” his father welcomed the carpenter, pulling him in after shaking hands, giving him a paternal pat on the back; “We were waiting for you. Who’s this young lady here?”

“This is Loona, dad,” Jim answers, trying to get his father up to speed; “She’s that woman I found in the creek last month or so.”

“Oh, bugger, is it now,” his father realizes, yawning briefly from presumably his age-induced morning snooze. Henry then extends his rough old hand out towards Loona for a handshake; “Good to see you, mate.”

Loona, with a bit of hesitancy, shakes the older gentleman’s hand, smiling as much as she could, perhaps successfully fighting her natural reclusiveness. As she firmly shook the man’s hand, she could smell the strong-scented cologne he was wearing which, by what she could tell, was perhaps much more than anyone else would ever need in their life.

Jim’s mother offers up a couple of chairs for them all to sit outside on the deck, with Loona begrudgingly accepting the offer to sit down with a “you didn’t have to”. This insistence fell on deaf ears as Jim’s mother was having none of it, insisting to the visitor that guests would get as fair treatment as anyone else. Although Loona was hesitant to verbally express her thanks for such authentic generosity, she did in the end appreciate it.

For the next couple of minutes, the family and their guest got to small talk, going on about usual mundane topics, such as how Jim’s Ute was running, how work was, how Henry’s health was going,

and so on. In addition, Loona was also asked some questions; who she was, how her day was going, her impressions of this town, amongst other topics.

Loona listened in, trying to figure out who the patriarch or matriarch in the family was; sometimes it seemed Jim's father was the one in charge, and at other times it seemed like Jim's mother. In all honesty, it was mildly amusing to see Catherine pull up Henry for making a stupid comment every so often, only to be met with a cackle from the aging man.

"Anyhow," Henry continued after cackling at his wife scolding him; "Where were you two heading off to? Looks like you're ready to go on a hike with all that stuff in the back there."

"Just camping," Jim conceded, gesturing to his Ute with all the equipment in the back; "Loona wanted to try it out, so I've decided we'd do it for the weekend. We'll be out around Coachman's Gully if you need me for anything."

Jim's dad nods his head as he clears his throat a little, his fist over his mouth for a moment; "Ah, up there! Yeah, yeah, your Aunt Jasmine and I used to camp up there when we were kids all the time! It's peaceful out there, by the river. Oh, bugger, that reminds me! I'll tell you why we wanted you over for a minute; your mother and I wanted to give you something in case you needed it."

Henry then gets up with a grunt from his chair and heads inside for a brief period of time, fumbling around in a storage cabinet very similar to Jim's. After a couple of seconds, he returns outside with a Revolver in his hands, the stock facing Jim; "Happy early birthday."

Jim gently grabs the stock and holds the entire revolver in his hands, feeling the weight of it; “Well, shoot, thanks dad! This isn’t your Webley, is it?”

“Sure is,” Henry chuckled; “I needed a new one anyway, so I’m passing it on.”

Jim sincerely thanks his old man again as he then shows the revolver to Loona who wanted to check it out for herself. The “human” raises her brow, mildly impressed with the design and appearance of the firearm. She carefully takes it out of Jim’s hands with his express permission, gripping onto the stock and getting used to the feel of it in her hands.

“How’d you get this, mister…?” Loona asks while leaning slightly forward in her seat to properly see Jim’s father, unsure of how to address him.

“Nah, no ‘mister’ business here - call me Henry. I got it from my dad, he was a serviceman for a brief period of time. Always loved that old thing and kept it to its original condition as much as possible.”

Loona nods along in acknowledgment, finding this information somewhat interesting, before interjecting her own contribution to the topic of firearms; “My dad’s a bit of a gun freak, too. He LOVES these pistols he’s got… I think they’re called “flintlocks” or some shit like that? I dunno, I’m not a gun type, so I’m probably speaking bullshit.”

“E-excuse me, Loona, I don’t mean to be rude,” Jim’s mother intervenes from the other side of the door after coming back out to offer a glass of water on a silver tray to everyone; “but can we refrain from using so much foul language? I hear enough of it from this old brute here.”

“You still married me, though,” Henry chortled, followed by a loud cackle as he took his glass, only to be met with a brief slap in the face with a cloth.

Jim takes his glass as he chuckles to the banter taking place to the left of him. Loona meanwhile rolled her eyes a bit at the dumb remark that had just been made. She then took a sip of her own ice-cold water, briefly nodding to Jim’s mother as thanks for the continued generosity.

“Anyhow,” Henry continued after his fit of laughter; “we best let you two leave! You got the whole day to enjoy; it’s gorgeous to camp up that way around this time, so you two should leave quick-smart.”

Jim finished his water and sat it down on his chair as he stood up, putting his broad brim hat back on and nodded in agreement; “Yeah, nah, might as well, hey,” Jim replied as he held his new revolver in his hands; “It’s great to see you two again.”

“No worries, son, we’ll see you on,” Jim’s father smiled, shaking his hand firmly. Jim’s mother, meanwhile, hugged him tightly before letting him leave.

“I’ll see you later. Oh, and take it easy, dad,” Jim called out as he made his way away from the house, followed by Loona.

“Thanks for the water, and for, uh- being so nice,” Loona added with a little more confidence, perhaps trusting Jim’s parents that bit more.

“Our pleasure, dearest. What’s ours is yours,” Jim’s mother called out with a welcoming demeanor as herself and her husband watched as the duo got back into the Ute. Jim started the engine, allowing the vintage workhorse to roar back to life. The young man honked the horn once to his parents as he waved them goodbye, Loona joining in with a much more brief yet noticeable wave, a brief smile appearing on her face. She sank back into her chair as she looked ahead, quite comfortable and calm with her surroundings.

“So, that’s your parents, is it,” Loona queried; “I like them, at least compared to Millie’s.”

“Ah, yeah,” Jim replied with a smile, appreciating Loona’s genuine compliment; “Why’s that, then?”

“Like- I don’t mean to judge them, but Millie’s were a bit too… extroverted, I guess,” Loona responded with a shrug, slightly gesturing with her hands to emphasize the point; “Like, yeah, sure; your parents get up to random bickering and dumb comments here and there, but they’re chill and not in-your-face about it - come to think of it, maybe that was just me being a reclusive asshole. But yeah, anyways; I felt welcome there, and honestly? I appreciate it all, especially your mom with just how generous she was; though, yeah, I’m still not used to that amount of kindness. Sure, I’m used to

it from you, but I mean from someone else entirely if that makes sense."

Jim snickers a little, fully understanding what she meant as they finally turn back onto the main road, heading north-west; "Yeah, I know what you're saying - they're very understanding and genuine old folks. They put up with my bullshit through my teen years, so I'm grateful for the fact that they didn't give up on me."

Loona turns her attention to the driver, glancing at him with a curious look in her eyes; "You keep saying you were a difficult kid and all that kinda stuff, but you've never told me specifics. What exactly did you used to do?"

Jim let out a rough sigh and shook his head briefly with a look in his eyes as if he was pained for having to explain it; "I- hah-.. I really don't think you want to know all that, Loona, I was just a dumb kid."

Loona raises her brow at Jim with a teasing and intrigued look on her face; "Oh, come on, you're ruining the fun! Spit it out, or I'll force it out of you," she jokes with a wide, light-hearted smirk.

Jim exhales from his nose and capitulates to Loona's demand for answers; "Nothing gets past you, does it? Alright, I'll give in, but I'm letting you know from now that this is the only time I'll talk about it; it's honestly- hah- it's honestly really embarrassing," he chuckles.

Loona shifts in her seat, signifying non-verbally that she was

intrigued and all-ears.

With a second more thought, the driver begins his tell-all as he speeds the car up to around eighty kilometers per hour:

“Alright, so I was fifteen. Young, perhaps borderline socially challenged and just a nuisance. There was a period of time where I used to skip school just to run off and do some stupid shit with some older teenagers. You know how I mentioned when I first met you that I know Constable Pearson? The reason why he knows me is because he caught me trying to aim a revolver at a speed limit sign as target practice just on the outskirts of town. I think I was with, I dunno, two or three older kids in their late teens and they were taking pot-shots with the same revolver, too. Anyways, in short, he pulled up and I-… I may have accidentally NEARLY put a shot through his windshield.”

Loona is taken aback, snorting with a slight baffled laugh and her eyes widening in bemusement; “I- WHAT? Dude, holy shit, no way!”

Jim becomes slightly embarrassed admitting this as he forces himself to continue; “No, I’m being fair dinkum! THAT’S why he knows me personally; I almost went to juvenile detention because of that stupid shit! Dad intervened though and convinced him to force me to fix up his old house as a form of community service. But, yeah, that’s the sorta dumb shit I got up to, you know? I dunno, Loona, it’s all hilarious yet embarrassing the bullshit I used to pull off.”

Loona laughs in astonishment at this revelation - though not at the driver himself; “Dude, this is hilarious! Like, honestly, I was just expecting some usual dumb teenager bullshit like getting REALLY

drunk and smashing a window - not fucking nearly shooting a cop! I would have NEVER believed you did something like that if someone else told me!"

"Ah, well, you've heard it from the horse's mouth now," Jim remarked, giving off an embarrassment-induced grin.

The inside of the Ute fell silent for a minute as the pair of them watched the scenery pass them, the occasional car and truck passing to the right of them in the opposite direction. Loona looks out her respective window, her chin resting on her palm in boredom and perhaps surprisingly tired of looking down at her phone. As they sped down the road and rounded a corner, Loona spotted something to the side of the road; it appeared to be a facility of sorts, surrounded by a few scattered gumtrees with what appeared to be a larger single-storey building surrounded by other smaller buildings. In some parts, the facility had some open spaces surrounded by tall mesh gates, the gumtrees providing adequate shade from the sun.

"What's that there," Loona asks inquisitively, trying to figure it out for herself but to no avail.

"What, that shelter there?," Jim replies, his eyes still fixated on the road ahead.

"That's a shelter?" Soon enough, something clicks in Loona's head; It was an animal shelter of sorts. She shudders a little and winces at the thought of it, thinking about her own experiences within her "shelter" before Blitz came into her life with a spring in his step and flintlocks in his hands.

“Yeah, one of those independent animal shelters. Haven’t been in there myself, but they usually have former stray dogs in there,” Jim explains in detail; “I wouldn’t fret, though - from what I’ve heard, they’re very decent people and they do genuinely look after them.”

Loona scoffs, obviously responding from her own experiences; “Suuuure… They all say that as cover-stories for what actually goes on behind the scenes,” she refutes.

Jim glances at Loona for a moment, giving off a half-smile; “Take it from me, matey; they’re nothing like how they are in the places you’re talking about. I know people who work in them; they’re genuine folks.”

Loona grunts in return before briefly looking back down to her phone, scrolling through mindlessly for a brief period of time, allowing for silence to consume the interior of the gray Ute, before Loona finds herself asking another question; “Have you ever considered getting a dog? You seem like the kinda guy that would have one, you know?”

Jim thinks about it, audibly considering the thought; “Ahh… I don’t think so, no - I never thought I’d be able to look after one properly.”

Loona raises her brow; “Dude, you put up with my bullshit when you saved my life - If you were able to do that, I’m pretty sure you’d be fine with a dog.”

“I did have one when I was young, but the poor thing went and decided to chew on one of them bloody cane toads; it ended up

dying a few hours later," Jim goes on to explain.

Loona winces at the thought with an audible "uff", feeling sorry for the mutt's incredibly unfortunate end. As the minutes went steadily by, small talk between them continued on-and-off as the road got more and more barren with less vehicles appearing on the road - towns and service stations becoming increasingly few and far between. At one point, they crossed over a bridge where a large dam lay below them. Loona blankly stared at it with mild interest - at least it was something else instead of just open plains, distant lonesome houses, livestock, and scattered trees which were beginning to become monotonous.

Shortly after clearing the bridge, a large sign appears to the left shoulder of the road, indicating the distance of the nearest town. Behind this sign was an intersection turning to the left which led onto a dirt road surrounded by more gum trees, the accumulation of forestry getting denser further into the distance. This is where Jim slows down and indicates, turning off into the road with the tires contacting the unpaved surface, the ride becoming that big rougher.

After a couple of minutes more of navigating through the tree-covered road ahead, it at long last finally ends at a clearing near a river which flowed with remarkably-clear water which reflected the sky above them.

Jim puts the car in park and prepares to get out; "Here we are, then- uff.. at last," Jim grunts as he swings his door open, getting out with a heave as his legs were slightly stiff from sitting in the same position for the past half hour.

## Chapter 2

## Chapter Text

Loona gets out to wander around a little bit and take it all in after checking with Jim if he needed any assistance, which he assured that he didn't. Jim then proceeds to unload the things they needed for the moment, such as both of their canvas tents and a tin-canister of water. Loona meanwhile, bringing along her bag, goes to sit under a particularly large gum tree by the water which loomed over her like a canopy, changing back into a hellhound as she did so.

The river wasn't particularly deep or wide, probably only one-and-a-half foot deep and probably nearly fifteen foot wide, though some exposed scattered rocks that poked above the water would be adequate enough to cross safely. The hellhound thought that it reminded her much of the boar-hunting trip that she took with Jim and Blitz to heal her dad's bruised ego about being a "crack shot". She smiled as she sat underneath this tree, also recalling how herself and Blitz opened up to each other as father-and-daughter in the aftermath of the hunting trip; how that genuine moment of intimacy between herself and her adoptive dad was pretty much the beginning of a better understanding between them, which Loona was glad and thankful of.

She relaxes there and closes her eyes, the shade of the gum tree's limbs cooling her down from the moderate heat, immensely enjoying the sound of distant crickets buzzing and the gentle wind blowing through her fur. After a little bit, Jim comes along to join her in a free spot to her right, bringing along two camping chairs and setting them up. Loona notices the chair available to her and gets up to dust the dirt from her clothes, thanking Jim for the seat. She sits down in her chair next to him with a huff as well as politely grabbing a tin flask of water Jim offered to her, which she much obliged, expressing it verbally.

“Nice spot, isn’t it,” Jim said quietly, careful not to disturb the trancing sounds of their surroundings.

“Just “nice?” More like perfect,” Loona adds, gesturing to the environment, making a sweeping motion with her free hand and drinking the water she had just received; “I mean look at it; there’s literally nothing like this back home - in the good way, obviously. Shit, I never would’ve thought until I got trapped here that I might be an outdoorsy-type of hellhound. Sure, I love being inside, but all in moderation. It’s not like there’s too many other outdoorsy hellhounds, either.”

Jim raises his eyebrow with curiosity, turning slightly towards Loona as he hands her a beer he had packed for later, to which she gladly took it; “How do you mean? Surely, I mean come on - you’d figure with being a hound and all that being outside would go hand-in-hand.”

Loona shakes her head, snickering; “Nope! But you’d figure, I get it. No, not really - most of us are just… permanently teenagers, in the mental sense I mean. I’m talking shit like drinking, smoking, drugs, parties that go all night, and I mean ALL night, getting black-out drunk and all that kinda dumb crap. This beer I got right now would be gone in an instant if I acted the way I used to, you know?”

“Ah yeah,” Jim chuckles, oddly intrigued by this pep-talk.

“Mhm! But, yeah, as I said; I’ve stopped doing so much of that. I mean- I still go to parties and get drunk sometimes, but I don’t do

that kinda stuff as much anymore, and in the sensitive stuff that I used to do, I've quit altogether. It's led to some of the others wondering if I'm unwell," Loona explains in detail before taking a sip of her beer with a brief swig.

Jim chuckles slightly in acknowledgement; "Ah, yeah? That's good to hear. What do you mean by "sensitive stuff"?"

Loona shrugs a bit, breathing in slightly through her teeth as she stares off into the distance; "You know, uh… the, uh- hard stuff," she admits, making an "injection" gesture with her fingers.

"Ah," Jim realizes, his tone becoming quieter as he looks off into the distance, dusting off his left trouser leg from some dirt that had settled with the back of his fingers. Loona looks to the man sitting adjacent to her right, noticing that his demeanor had slightly changed, a hesitant and pensive look forming in his eyes. This change in his demeanor confused the hellhound slightly, though something deep down made her wonder whether or not she should've even mentioned the topic at all.

The odd silence continues a few seconds longer before Jim begins speaking again, albeit with a more somber and reflective tone; "I nearly lost a mate of mine to hard drugs about two years ago. They found him near the state border on the coast completely fucked up on who-knows-what - it wasn't pretty from what I heard."

Loona is slightly taken aback at this sudden admittance; "Oh shit, really?"

Jim slowly nods his head solemnly; “Aye. His sister hadn’t seen him in days so they came and saw me, asking me if I had seen him. I hadn’t either so I told her that, and about an hour later it was confirmed that he was in ICU due to an overdose in the state capital. He’s fine now, he’s been in rehab for a while and is pretty much clean, but… it was a dark chapter in his life, and for mine and his family’s as well.”

“O-oh shit..” Loona solemnly replies as she looked down for a moment, a feeling of guilt rushing over her; “Fuck, man, I-I’m sorry for bringing it up - I know it’s some real heavy shit to talk about.”

Jim turns his head towards Loona with a reassuring smile, putting his hand up briefly in a slight-sweeping gesture; “Nah, matey, don’t beat yourself up. I’m alright to speak about it. Me, personally, I’m just glad that you’ve quit it altogether.”

Loona nods with a smile in return; “So am I. Hey, look - maybe you were an influence on me and the reason as to why I quit,” she adds with a reassuring look. Jim smiles in return as he nudges her slightly with his elbow before silence invites itself into their surroundings shortly after.

Jim coughs a little, putting his hand over his mouth before asking a question; “So, like… how or why do people go for that kinda stuff in the first place?”

Loona hesitates as she thinks on how to answer, drawing from her own experience; “Uh… I’m not going to try to speak for everyone, but… at least for me, it was to fit in, I guess? I didn’t want to be seen as a pussy for not doing it. I mean, I no longer give a shit about what they think of me that much anymore, but back then

how I appeared to people was a big part of me," she explains, reflecting back on it.

Jim bows his head with a very short and monotone hum, understanding what Loona was saying; "So, like, peer pressure?"

Loona nods, confirming this suspicion; "Yeah, pretty much."

Jim nods understandably, knowing how it felt as silence began to overcome the both of them once more.

To start conversation again before silence returned to the camp, Jim points across the river to where the bushland got particularly thick with an accumulation of trees: "They say there's an abandoned mining camp somewhere not too far through there, just where I'm pointing. If you feel like it, we'll go check it out."

"Hm," Loona grunts; "Maybe, but I think for the moment we should sit here. That's the problem with you, Jim; you move around too much. You need some time to, you know, properly relax and laze around. If there's anyone who knows how to do it, it's absolutely me," the hellhound explains with authority on the subject.

Jim stops to think for a moment before responding; "You think so?"

"Dude, I know so," Loona reaffirms, taking another swig of her beer; "I've seen how much you work - I think you're deserving of some proper rest."

“Ah, well… thanks for that,” Jim smiles warmly, thankful that his mate recognised his efforts to keep himself afloat.

Loona then pats Jim on the shoulder with a smile in response as a form of banter before slumping back into her chair and looking down the river, watching as a small pack of wallabies vanishes into the tree line. Morning turned to afternoon with both man and hound sitting around, though Jim did try to get up and do something, only to be coaxed back down into his seat by Loona. The hellhound had to occasionally remind Jim to relax, who knew that he was fidgety because he felt like he was doing nothing productive. That was when Jim realized something:

“Oh, shit! I just realized I bought that CD player in the car. You don’t mind if I get up and get it,” Jim asked politely, gesturing to his vehicle. He really couldn’t believe what he was doing; asking his friend for permission to move, perhaps because of her, albeit polite, insistence that he should relax, which he perhaps appreciated.

Loona shrugs; “Sure? Why would I care if you do?”

“Ah, you know, I may or may not try to pace around and find something productive to do,” Jim concedes, scratching his neck from an itch.

“…Okay, fair point. I’ll be your slave, then,” Loona jokes as she gets up and retrieves Jim’s car keys from his hands. Not even a minute later, Loona comes back with the CD player and some CDs, slotting one of the tracks in and allowing the device to play freely, at long last having something to entertain them.

What Loona ended up playing was a song she'd personally never heard before. She looked at the CD player in between them which was sitting on her bag, somewhat beginning to find fascination in the song playing:

"Who's this," Loona asks, pointing to the device.

"It's an older band called Australian Crawl," Jim responds; "This is one of their songs - "Reckless", I'm pretty sure it's called."

"Huh…," Loona nods her head slowly, taking in the music; no it wasn't her accustomed heavy metal or the classic metal like AC/DC or the likes, but it was it's own genre which stood well. It sounded calm yet oddly melancholic at the same time; in fact, she began to like it more as the song continued its performance.

The afternoon passed quickly with the passage of time being made up of sitting by the ridge of the river and having a later lunch. Jim opened up two cans of Braised Steak and Onion and began heating them on top of a small portable iron fire pit. The firewood simmered away as Loona took her can first, eating it slowly and, to her surprise, savoring the taste; Sure, it was canned, but it didn't taste horrible, and combined with a bread roll it was half decent for camping food.

Wildlife spotting, half-arsed karaoke, beer within moderation, and lengthy, entertaining conversation about nothing in particular; this is what kept both man and hellhound entertained and contempt with their surroundings until night fell upon them, the sky slowly but surely filling up with the mesmerizing view of countless stars above them. They both took the time to look up from their camping chairs into the night sky, the moonlight reflecting on the clear water of the river, the simmering firewood in the firepit crackling

periodically.

“Wow…” Loona simply remarked; “This never gets old, this… this view. I understand why Octavia loved it out here when I bought her over.”

Jim softly laughed in agreement; “Heh- Oh, absolutely. That look in her eye when she looked up that first night on the veranda… absolutely mesmerized.”

Loona hums briefly, agreeing; “Mhm, yep. You’re lucky to live out in all this, you know?”

Jim responds with a slight unfocused nod, savoring this absolutely peaceful moment as the crickets chirped, the night being that bit cooler than the day. Roughly an hour passes with a little bit more small talk and brief exchange of stories here and there before Loona and Jim both decide to call it a night. They both finally got up from their camping chairs and headed back towards the Ute where two decently-sized canvas tents had been set up, complete with a bed-roll as a makeshift floor, pillows and blankets for the both of them as the interior. Both tents had a torch in case anything happened in an absolute emergency and as an adequate source of light.

Loona opted for the tent to her right, sitting directly in front of the entrance, sliding her bag into the far back of the tent. For a moment, the hellhound looks back towards the river which was lit up with the faint moonlight above them, as Jim gets into his respective cover, taking off his boots with an ache-induced grunt. Loona pulls out her phone from her jacket pocket and takes a photo of the area directly in front of them, the glistening water of the river visible through the thin veil of gum trees which loomed over

it.

Loona yawns loudly with a massive stretch and decides to review the photo she just took before heading off to sleep. She examines the photo on her screen with tired eyes, the light of the phone screen straining her focus as she struggles to stay awake. Although Loona was just about to fall dead-asleep, something off somewhere in the distance manages to catch her attention. The hellhound's ears suddenly stand completely alert as she looks into the direction of the treeline across the river, trying to figure out if she just heard something.

Jim notices this as he peers from out within his tent; "You alright?"

Loona doesn't respond right away, still trying to focus through tired eyes off into the distance; "Y-yeah, I'm alright.. I thought I heard something move. Just across the river, o-over there," Loona tries to explain through her fatigue-induced slurring, pointing briefly across to the other side of the reflectant water.

"Huh…" Jim merely responds, rubbing his eyes briefly from sleep to focus his gaze off into the general direction.

Without saying another word other than a brief tired "'night", the pair of them finally slip into their "beds", Loona opting to stay up a little bit more in case of any further noises, though after a few minutes found herself falling asleep.

…

Loona at last wakes up to the faint sound of something being poured off into the distance. She groggily sits upright and rubs the sleep from her squinting scarlet-red eyes, noticing that a patchy fog hung over the land, giving the area an incredibly mesmerizing look as the morning sun created rays through the trees. She checks her phone for the time: 7:02AM, it reads in local time. She also noticed she had received a text from Blitz in incredibly broken writing:

“Hye Loonie! It’s ur dad1 I hoap you’re’re haven a gud time!1 I mis u!”

Loona gives off a small smile, finding his constant nicknames for her endearing for a change. She replies to his text after completely translating roughly what he was trying to say:

“Everything’s fine, dad. TY. I won’t be long. LY. -Loona,” she texts, as well as attaching the image she took the night before.

After sending the message, she gets out of her canvas tent, standing up before stretching her arms behind her head and flexing her shoulders with a yawn, still trying to wake up. She ends up finding Jim standing in the distance near the river, a new fire crackling away in the fire pit, the white smoke drifting gently away from him.

“Morning, dude,” Loona greets as she stands next to him, her hands nestled away in the pockets of her jacket.

“Morning to you. How was your sleep,” Jim asks as he hands the hellhound a tin cup of freshly-brewed coffee he had just poured for her.

“Meh, I can’t complain,” Loona smirks with a half-awake look in her eyes as she peered off down-river. She sips her tar-black coffee, savoring the slightly-sweet taste of the sugar he had mixed in with it, canceling out the usually bitter taste associated with plain coffee on its own; “How about yours?”

Jim grunts; “Ah, not too bad. So, what did you feel like doing? I’m currently out of ideas.”

Loona thinks about it for a while, going through possible options. She looks back across the river, thinking about the abandoned site that Jim mentioned the previous day; “Uhh… Hm. I wouldn’t mind hiking, to be honest. You said yesterday that you wanted to check out that mining camp - you still want to?”

“Only if you’d like to - don’t wanna bore you too much,” Jim replies as he drank his own coffee.

“If I didn’t wanna explore, I wouldn’t have said that I wanted to try camping out,” the hellhound reassured with a smile; “Besides; you make all of this interesting in a… I don’t know the word for it, but you’re fun in a “boring” kind of way - hope you know what I’m tryna say.”

“Hm! I think I do,” Jim nods with a grin as he at last finishes his coffee, proceeding to crouch down and wash the tin cup out in the crystal-clear water of the river.

Loona soon after finishes her own coffee and washes it out before handing it back to Jim who takes it, storing it away back at the

tents before they set off across the river. They crossed at the shallowest rock-covered part of the river so that their clothing wouldn't get too wet, and soon enough they were on the other side, heading off into the wilderness. To make things that bit more entertaining and as a personal memento, Loona decides to film the walk with her phone. She holds it horizontally, filming Jim who was in front of her with a bag of essentials over his shoulder, navigating his way through the scrub.

Loona decides to perform a bit of a running commentary out of boredom; "It's day one in being out of the middle of butt-fuck nowhere, and this country yokel in front of me is leading me somewhere - where are we heading again, dude," Loona calls out to the "country yokel" in front of her with an entertained smile.

Jim, without turning around or stopping, plays along; "Well, matey, we're- uh.. we're heading to this old mining camp which shouldn't be too far now. We'll probably find something interesting, or we may not - who knows."

"Nice, very nice. You're not planning on murdering me, are you," Loona jokes with a brief snicker through her grin.

"Nahhh, not today I don't think. You'd tear me to shreds if I tried," Jim remarks in return, only to be met with chuckling from behind the phone.

A few quips more of commentary later and at long last they make their way through a clearing where the gum trees dispersed, coming across what appeared to be ruins overshadowed by a slight cliff which was probably no more than fifteen feet high. Contained in this considerably-large clearing were the ruins of the mining

operation that once dominated the local economy; to the far left was a large single-storey worker's cottage built of hardwood timber with a large veranda stretching around the front, the roof since caved-in on one side and what appeared to be a tree growing from the interior, poking out through the rusted corrugated iron roof.

To the right of them was another couple of buildings; two storage huts which were, remarkably, still standing despite the surrounding decay that had taken place, and the remains of another large timber building which had long since completely collapsed, though the facade was still standing in places with remnants of glass. The most notable feature of this scene, however, was what was carved into the side of the jagged cliff at the bottom; two large rectangular-shaped shafts which cut deep into the earth. One was boarded up and falling apart but the other, to the right, was still in what appeared to be remarkably good condition.

Loona looks around with mild interest, once again taking out her phone and filming the scene, slowly panning the camera around as she filmed, the sound of buzzing insects periodically dominating the ambience around them. Some flies hung around her head, making her ears flick in annoyance before she promptly managed to smack some of them with her hands.

"Agh! You little shits," Loona mumbles as she swung at them briefly, now wishing that she had bought some insect spray.

"At least you got the accuracy to catch those bastards," Jim snickers as he sets down his gear under the veranda of the old worker's hut, the shade being enough to take off his broadbrim hat and air off his hair.

Loona, meanwhile, continues to film her surroundings and slowly approaches the two shafts, zooming into the darkness to see if she could see anything. The hellhound thought about what exactly could be in those tunnels - what could be staring right back at her without her even noticing. Sure, the hellhound had the means to defend herself, being arguably stronger than most things out here, but the mere thought of the unknown in the darkness made her shudder, her ears briefly folding back after freaking herself out a little bit.

Loona pans the camera back towards Jim who was now lining up some empty bottles from the day prior, placing them on a rotted pile of timbers. Grasped in his other hand was the Webley Revolver his father had gifted to him the previous day which he had apparently just loaded. The hellhound continues to film the young "marksman" who stepped back a good ten feet before aiming the revolver with one hand at one of the targets. After a few seconds more, the gun fires with a loud crack, making Loona jump slightly.

"You wanna try this out," Jim calls out to the camera-hellhound, gesturing for her to come over.

"Shooting?," Loona asks as she stops filming, sliding her phone back into her pocket; "I don't know, what if I fuck up?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there," Jim shrugs as Loona goes to stand next to him, finding that Jim had missed his shot; "Besides, I'm piss poor at aiming revolvers."

"Pfft- Aight," Loona replies as she hesitantly takes the gun out of Jim's hands and grasps the stock with her hands, still getting used to the feel of it; "So, uh… what do I need to do?"

“Try to shoot those bottles over there, see if you can get one,” Jim points to one of the targets to his right; “Just pull the hammer back with your thumb and aim but don’t tense up your arm, it will sprain it if you do.”

“Got it - I think,” Loona responds, slowly aiming at the furthest target to the right. She closes her right eye, carefully squinting at her target through the iron sight as she prepares to fire.

…

“BANG!”

Loona feels the recoil hit her tight grip slightly as her target splinters into a million fragmented pieces! She couldn’t believe it - she actually managed to shoot something. She smiles to herself, proud of her achievement.

“Huh! Would you look at that,” Loona exclaims as she turns back to Jim who was impressed by her aim; “I didn’t fuck it up! Uff- Fuck me, that recoil’s insane, though,” she adds as she flexes her fingers a little bit from the slight pain.

“Want to try the next couple of ones? I’ll film it if you’d like,” Jim offers as he takes a swig from his steel water bottle.

“Sounds like an idea - knock yourself out,” Loona grins as she hands Jim her phone with a light-hearted smug look in her eyes, obviously beginning to find enjoyment in this; “Get some kick-ass shots of me, make them look cinematic and all that good shit.”

“No guarantees,” Jim cackles as he begins filming off to the side, making sure to get both the hellhound and her targets in frame.

Loona takes this opportunity to stand back a bit more and fire a quick shot into the direction of the next target like a quick-draw show-off, only to then miss which bruises her newfound ego to the amusement of Jim as he filmed. She regained her composure and fired another round, managing to hit the next target straight on-point. Her expression on her face beams in triumph, glancing back at Jim with a toothy grin and a sparkle in her eyes to gloat about her flawless accuracy, quite obviously having fun.

“Click- BANG! …Click- BANG! … Click- BANG!”

Shot after shot, and at last Loona had managed to shatter all of her targets into smithereens, whirling the gun in her hand to show off a little bit more to Jim’s brief amusement at the spectacle.

“Bloody Norah… And you said you weren’t a gun-type of woman,” Jim remarks in awe as he takes the revolver out of Loona’s hand, emptying out the casings in the chamber.

“That’s because I’m not,” Loona chuckled as she took her phone back; “Though I have learnt a bit watching Moxxie and Blitz doing target practice over time. I’d never thought I’d be this good,

though," she concedes with a proud look on her face, gesturing over to the shattered remains of their beer bottles.

"Ah yeah, righto. Anyhow - how's my camera work," Jim inquires, hoping it was up to the hellhound's expectations.

Loona unlocks her phone to see the results, looking through the shots with a blank expression. She replays some of the video, watching herself obliterate the targets with remarkable precision for an amateur.

Loona raises her brow with a satisfied smile, nodding her head slightly before looking back up at her personal cameraman: "It's pretty good! Thanks for doing that for me, I appreciate it. I'll warn you first, though - I'll probably gloat about this if anyone tries to give me shit," Loona adds with a snicker.

"Ah, well, you probably deserve to as well, seeming that's probably your first proper try at shooting," Jim compliments before placing the emptied revolver back into the bag.

As he does so, Loona goes around taking a few photos of the surroundings, probably to show Blitz when she gets back or probably to keep to herself - she hadn't fully decided yet. After a few quick photos dotted around the place, she reviews them with a keen eye under the shade of the worker's cottage veranda, crossing one leg over the over as she leant on one of the posts supporting the withered roof. The hellhound flicks through each photo, stopping for a moment to examine the quality before moving on to the next one - some were crap, while others were alright, and a few she found were near perfect.

To keep her mind occupied after keeping herself entertained with her newfound marksmanship, Loona comes up with an idea; “Oh hey, Jim, could I suggest something,” she asks, calling out to him as he was about to check out some of the other ruined structures.

“Absolutely - what’s up,” he answers, turning back around to face her.

“I’ve got some shit I’d like to show you in the bag I bought, I think you’d be interested to see it,” she suggests as she once again swats a bug of dubious origins flying around her head.

“Might as well, hey,” Jim accepts as he picks up his bag over his shoulder and adjusts his broad brim hat on his head; “What is it exactly?”

“Oh, you know,” Loona explains as she follows him out of the clearing and back towards where they came from; “Some collections and stuff I’ve found over the years.”

“There’s no, like, cursed shit is there? I don’t wanna put anything on me by looking at it,” Jim vents his one nagging concern as they walk through the scrub back downhill towards the river.

“Hah- No no, nothing like that! Don’t worry,” Loona reassures, waving her hand to emphasize this; “I’m talking memorabilia and all that from, like, bands and some of the music I listen to. I think I bought a poster? I can’t remember though.”

“Aight, aight,” Jim nods along with mild interest as he clears the path for the both of them, shoving some low-hanging branches away with his hands.

It takes them both a little bit of time, but at long last they finally arrive back at the river and cross over the shallowest point, carefully treading over the wet rocks in case they slipped. In all honesty with herself, Loona was glad that they were back at somewhere that felt safe and familiar. There was something odd about one of those shafts that was mysteriously easily accessible, despite obviously being so dangerous after such a long time being abandoned.

The hellhound sighs as she makes her way over to her tent, taking a massive drink of water before finally turning to Jim who was sitting in the short grass and dirt in front of his tent, his hat hanging on top of the tent-pole closest to him. In front of him was the cast-iron fire pit full of freshly-lit firewood which he had lit so that he could make breakfast for the both of them.

“Alright, I got the stuff here. Ready to see some cool shit,” Loona announces with a grin as she sits down roughly in front of her tent, the bag with her personal belongings in her hands.

“Damn, Loona, you’re murdering me with the suspense! Go on then, show me,” Jim lightly encourages as he turns his attention to the hellhound, shifting over a little bit while still sitting. He adjusts his sitting position with one leg stretched out and the other leg propped up, his arm resting on his raised knee.

Loona snorts in amusement at the “country yokel’s” enthusiastic insistence; “Alright, alright, calm the fuck down and I’ll show you,” she snickers before pulling out what appeared to be an article of clothing; it was a quite stylish yet plain red flannel overshirt with short sleeves - if anything, it reminded Jim of his own shirts, which made him smile in amusement slightly.

“Almost ended up wearing this out here with another shirt I had at home, but as you can see, I decided “fuck it” and just wore this jacket I bought from here. I still bought it just to show it off I guess,” Loona explains as she held the overshirt out like a towel, mildly fond of it; “I’m pretty sure I wore this thing out to that ranch I think I told you about.”

“I think you did tell me about a “ranch”,” Jim confirms, remembering something like that being mentioned; “I think you said it was owned by… I think Millie’s folks, was it?”

Loona clicks her fingers and points to Jim as she fumbles through her bag again; “Yup! Hey, look at that, you’re paying attention! Alright, let’s see… uhh.. that’s just some bullshit from Blitz, uhh… that’s my eyeliner… oh, fuck, you’ll like this,” she finally beams as she pulled out a poster which she unravelled.

“No way,” Jim stares in mild awe, realizing what it was; an original ‘Guns n’ Roses’ poster from a tour around the 2000s, which listed a few American states which they had toured; “Where’d you get this, then?”

“Oh, I didn’t get it, Blitz got it for me when he went out somewhere,” Loona corrects as she tried to shake the creases out of it; “I remember it because it was one of the first things he did for

me when he first adopted me. He noticed I liked that kind of stuff, so he gifted it to me as a “birthday present”. According to him, he bought it, but knowing that asshole; nine times out of ten it’s most likely stolen.”

“I’d expect nothing less,” Jim grunts, giving Loona a knowing look in agreement. He looks towards the hellhound’s bag, noticing what appears to be a large book; “Hang on, what’s that in there?”

“Hm? Oh, that book? That’s how I get myself home,” Loona explains as she gestures to it; “It’s what I’ve been carrying around like a deadweight the past couple of times I’ve been out here. Reason as to why I got stuck here in the first place is because I forgot about it last-minute. Then again, I thought I’d be able to remember it because I was being a fucking over-confident dumbass, and Moxxie said something beforehand about me being “useless” and I said “fuck you, Moxxie; you little glorified sentient diseased scrotum! I’ll prove you wrong! I’ll go out on a job on my own and complete it without your help, you fat, insufferable little-” …hang on, am I ranting?”

“Haha- Yep, and it’s fucken hilarious,” Jim confirms with a suppressed cackle and an entertained smirk painted on his face, finding Loona’s spite-fuelled rant to be an absolute riot.

“Wha- Don’t laugh at my pain, you dumbass,” Loona scoffs as she shoves him lightly; “But then again, maybe I bought some of it upon myself.”

The hellhound then puts the belongings she had bought out back into her bag before stretching, getting up to head to the river; “Give me a minute, just gotta wash my face.”

“No worries,” Jim responds as he finally throws two cans of braised steak and onion on top of the fire pit on a grate, getting on to the task of cooking. As he tends to the fire, a ringtone starts going off next to him.

Without thinking because of his fixation on the fire pit, Jim picks up the phone and answers whoever was calling without looking; “G’day, this is Jim.”

“Sweetie, it’s your dad! I need you to- wait, what the fuck?”

Jim is taken aback, hearing that very familiar and grating voice in his ear, finding that he had unknowingly picked up Loona’s phone that she had left.

“Oh shit,” Jim realized his mistake, pained to have to talk to this dunderhead once more; “Matey, it’s such an immense “privilege” to hear your voice again, I’ve-”

“Don’t fucking “matey” me Jim-boy, where’s Loon- … You’ve taken her hostage, haven’t you,” Blitz begins to growl on the other end, his tone drastically changing to become verbally intimidating.

Jim scoffs, taken aback by this notion; “Fucken- why would I do tha-”

“WHAT THE FUCK HAVE YOU DONE TO HER,” Blitz bellows from the other side of the phone; “I swear you inbred motherfucker, if you’ve even laid a single shit-ridden finger on my daughter’s head, I will turn your flesh into a fucking casserole and use your entrails as my personal-”

Jim lowers the phone from his ear as he rolls his eyes, knowing that there was no calming down that deranged idiot on the other side of the phone. Just in time, Loona comes back over, noticing her phone which was faintly emanating the sound of Blitz’s deranged screaming; “What the fuck? Is that Blitz?”

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Jim apologizes; “I wasn’t looking and I didn’t realize it was your phone ringing, so I accidentally answered it. He’s thought I've gone and kidnapped you or something.”

Loona sighs, rubbing her fingers in the space between her eyes at Blitz’s over-reaction: “Aight, leave it to me,” she huffs, picking up the phone and holding it to her ear, only to be met with Blitz’s infuriated ramblings consisting of insults that were pretty much thrown at the wall in the hope they would stick:

“DO YOU HEAR ME, YOU CROCODILE DUNDEE MOTHERFUCKER? I WILL REIGN DOWN FURY ON YOUR DISEASE-RIDDEN, FUCK-STICK, HILLBILLY ASS-”

“Dad, it’s me! calm the fuck down,” Loona interrupts to the relief of Blitz on the other end.

“Sweetie!! Oh my fucking- Loonie- Loonie Toonie, please! A-are you okay? What the fuck’s he done to you,” Blitz desperately questions in his usual worrisome fashion from the other end.

“He hasn’t done anything, he just answered my phone by accident! I promise I’m fine, we’re enjoying it out here,” Loona clarifies, trying her best to calm her dad down.

Loona hears Blitz taking deep breaths on the other side of the phone for a couple of seconds, his breath steadying and shuddering from the fury-induced fit that had happened mere seconds ago; “Uffff- O-okay.. Okay.. Hehe, I’m sorry sweetie, I just get- heh- really FUCKING pissed at the thought of something happening to you. Alright, I won’t waste your time - could you do something for your old man while you’re out there?”

“Yes I can, what is it,” Loona responds quickly with a slightly blunt tone, wiping her face with a cloth from the remnants of the river water she had washed her face with.

“Yeah, look, can you get some hair spray for me? Pretty pleeease,” Blitz pleas from the other end, his voice resembling almost like a child begging for a mouthful of mineral turpentine to try out the taste.

Loona’s brow furrowed as she stuttered in bewilderment; “What? What the hell do you need hair spray for? Have you SEEN your head?”

“A man can dream, Loonie,” Blitz refutes; “But, yeah, that’s all I need! If you could get that hillbilly motherfucker to escort you there or some shit, that would be excellent!”

“Can you stop calling him that, please? Alright, I’ll get it for you,” Loona capitulates as she huffs, knowing there’s no trying to convince Blitz otherwise.

“Thank you, sweetie,” Blitz cheerfully replies; “I’ll see you soon! Love you!”

Loona sighs again, giving off a small endeared smile; “...Love you too, dad. Talk to you later,” she finishes, hanging up the call.

“Fucking hair spray?,” Jim snorts with a hint of bewilderment.

Loona shrugs and throws her hands up briefly, baffled as well; “I give up with him, to be completely honest. So yeah, you think we can head into the nearest town from here?”

“I suppose; I’m just worried about leaving all of my things here, you know? I can go into town for you and you stay here to keep watch. I’ll give you my number just in case you need anything,” Jim offers as he takes the two cans of braised steak and onion off the grate to cool them down.

“Saves me the trouble of having to do it,” Loona agrees with the proposal as she sat down in front of her tent, leaning up against her bag which had been propped up, her legs crossed without a care in the world; “I appreciate it, dude.”

“Nah, no worries, mate; but first, a late breakfast,” he announces as

he finally serves both cans, handing one to Loona as he ate his own - the hellhound on the other hand, opted to just eat hers out of the can, tipping it up a little bit to catch it in her muzzle.

After finishing up his own mess tin, he gets up with a grunt and heads to the Ute parked a few feet away after giving Loona his contact details just in case. Loona bids the country yokel a temporary farewell as he starts the car and heads off back down the beaten track towards the nearest town. For the moment, Loona was alone again with nothing but her own thoughts and the gentle breeze to accompany her. She found herself dozing off to the trancing quiet around her but chose not to fight it, allowing her to slump down further with her bag as a headrest.

## Chapter 3

## Chapter Text

Roughly an hour later, Loona is awoken to the familiar sound of a car door slamming and the sound of boots coming up from behind her. She grunts, finally waking up and turning around to find Jim with Blitz's totally useful hairspray.

"I spent fifteen dollars for that idiot," he groans as he places it next to Loona's tent.

"No shit? Did you get the cheapest?," Loona asks, looking up at the young man as he sat back down in front of his tent near the simmering fire pit, the fire since dead.

"Nah, that's all they had," he confirms, appearing to be somewhat restless.

Loona notices this and sits upright, using her elbows as support; "You okay there?"

"Huh? Yeah, I'm alright, I just-… ah fucking hell, I nearly had a fight with a small group of blokes as I came out of the store there," Jim goes on to explain, wiping his brow with his palm.

"Oh, what? What happened," Loona questions as an act of courtesy for his well-being.

“I bumped into them on the way out and they didn’t take it well. There was some exchange of words, but-… I don’t know, they seemed like they were up to some shit. Kind of worried they’ll find us here and start something.”

“Huh, I see,” Loona acknowledges, turning back towards the pathway back out towards the main road; “I don’t think you need to worry, Jim; we’re pretty isolated out here.”

“Sure, maybe you’re right. I just can’t be fucked with direct confrontation like that,” Jim goes on to explain his nervousness.

Loona nods along, understanding; “Yeah, I get that. Don’t want to ruin a perfectly good getaway, huh?”

“E-exactly,” Jim grins through his slight nervousness; “I don’t want to seem like a wuss, tho-”

“Oh shut up,” Loona interrupts, putting up her index finger in his direction; “Don't you go degrading yourself like that. You’re FAR from being one; trust me, I know a lot of pussies, you’re absolutely not one of them.”

“Heh, righto,” Jim responds with a slight smile, looking up into the tree canopies above them.

Midday turned to late afternoon, Loona scrolling on her phone mindlessly out of boredom while Jim lay on his back with his legs crossed and his lightly-worn hat over his face. To cure her boredom and to pass the time, Loona opts to bring up a topic, interrupting Jim from his slumber:

“Have you ever had something fucked up happen to you?”

“How do you mean,” Jim asks with newfound curiosity, lifting his hat off his face and turning his head to Loona’s direction where she too was lazing around.

“Like… uhh… like something that sticks with you for a long time, but not like a traumatic experience. Sorry if it sounds very personal, I’m just trying to find something to talk about,” Loona explains as she takes a swig of another beer she had found.

“Huh… I think I have, when I was fairly young,” Jim replied as he scratched his chin.

“You wanna share it? I mean, if you’re comfortable to do so,” Loona emphasized, who was relieved that at last something was happening that would keep her from dying of boredom.

“Nah, of course I’m comfortable,” Jim chuckles as he sits upright, dusting some dirt off his clothes which had settled as he laid down; “I think it’s more… unexplained if anything? As in, yeah it is “fucked up”, but it wasn’t as if it was traumatic.”

“Go on, tell me,” Loona perks up, anticipating something intriguing

- Jim did tell interesting stories after-all.

“If you insist,” Jim titters as he begins; “I was up camping with dad when I was around, uh, I think I was twelve years old, and we had crossed over the state border south of here to camp near this huge national park…”

Loona eagerly listened in as he went on with this little recounting, telling of how at one point in his stay in that campsite, his dad began to hear what sounded like a kid calling out off into the distance. Loona wouldn’t admit it, but this idea of having to hear something like that unsettled her greatly, feeling a chill creep up her back.

“You sure it wasn’t one of those mimicking type birds,” Loona suggests, genuinely intrigued.

“No no, it wasn’t like that,” Jim refutes, gesturing to further emphasize the point; “It sounded too human to be a bird, know what I mean? I remember hearing it myself, and to be honest I may have nearly pissed myself - I mean, my old man pretty much did.”

Loona leaned slightly forward as she held her knees, thinking back to the night before where she swore that somewhere off into the distance she heard the distinct sound of careful, quiet footsteps somewhere across the river. The hellhound couldn’t help but wonder if somewhere around them in this forest, something was lurking, ready to hunt down its next victim. She shook this thought off, however, drowning it with a brief swig of her beer perhaps knowing that she couldn’t afford to spook herself.

The sun at this time barely shone over the horizon as night began to take over, the cover of darkness becoming the most prominent thing around the duo of campers. The night passed quickly with a few more “fucked up” stories being shared from their past experiences, taking turns in attempting to freak eachother out, Loona perhaps having the best success as Jim felt himself becoming mildly frightened of some of the experiences she had shared. Soon enough, night had fallen and the temptations of snoozing off began to empower Loona first, perhaps the mid-strength beer in her system aiding this feeling along.

“Ah, fuck- I wish I could stay awake more, man… agh- dammit, I’m feeling myself dozing off,” Loona capitulates, her row of teeth exposed as she let out perhaps the loudest, most obnoxious yawn she had perhaps ever done, though she was too tired to give a shit.

“Nah, you’re alright, matey. Have a goodnight, hey,” Jim replies as he gazes off into the night sky, the gum tree canopies above them blowing gently with the trancing breeze from further up the ranges.

“I’m sure I will - goodnight, man, you get some proper rest, too,” Loona groans with exhaustion as she stumbles into her tent and pretty much crashes on her makeshift bed, almost falling asleep in an instant.

After around a minute, Jim could hear the sure sound of brief muffled snoring coming from within the tent adjacent to him, confirming to him that he was now the only one awake within the camp. Jim stays up for a little while, making sure that the last embers of the firepit are extinguished before he, too, slips off into his tent, taking off his boots and putting them just outside the entrance flaps. After a little bit of tossing and turning he at long last slips into sleep as the faint, frequent sound of isolated cicadas

buzzes, filling the otherwise quiet ambience.

…

Loona awakens from her slumber, snorting briefly as she sluggishly opens her eyes, making sense of her surroundings once more. From within her canvas tent, Loona could tell that it was still dark out, the moon still reflecting its light into the surrounding wilderness, casting long shadows through the tree canopies. She groggily grabs her phone next to her to check the time, the sudden light of the phone screen straining her eyes, making her squint; “11:45PM” it read in local time.

Loona groans, about to fall asleep again before something tells her that something didn’t seem quite right - something was missing, though she couldn’t exactly tell what it was. She looked around the inside of her tent as she rubbed the sleep from her scarlet eyes, finding that everything was still here; her phone (obviously), her bag with everything still inside including her clothing and her means to return home, the poster, eyeliner - everything was still here.

Loona squints at nothing in particular, thinking on what could possibly be missing, what would be… wrong? She gets up from out of her tent with a brief heave, groaning as she finds her balance to look around the campsite. The fire pit was still there, Jim’s Ute was too, Jim’s boots-... Jim’s rich-brown Williams boots were missing.

“Why were they gone? Did he put them on to go take a piss or something like that? Did something take them?” These thoughts ran through her head, not necessarily becoming concerned as of yet, rather finding it odd that they weren’t in the accustomed place

where he put them. To put her mind at ease, she quietly made her way over to his tent to open the canvas tent flaps; “Surely he’d be in there. He would’ve awoken her from her sleep if he had moved-...”

Jim wasn’t in his tent.

Now Loona was that bit more weirded out and confused. “Where the fuck had he gone off to? He wouldn’t just wander off too far like this, would he?” she thought to herself as she peered through slightly more alert eyes at her surroundings. Despite her attempts to locate this “country yokel”, it was obvious that he wasn’t within the immediate area. Without much luck, Loona decides to call out into the night, though not too loudly:

“Jim? Hey, Jim, you out there? Dude, where are you,” Loona calls out through a croaky, fatigued tone as she was still trying to wake up. She listened out for any response… nothing; absolutely butt-fuck nothing.

“Come on, Jim, where the fuck are you? you’re… you’re worrying me,” she calls out once again but to no avail.

She peers around the campsite, now genuinely concerned. She notices something near the flap of Jim’s tent; it was the Webley Revolver. She bends down and grabs it, loading a couple of shots which she found next to it and aimed up into the sky, firing off a few rounds to hopefully get a response.

“...Click- BANG! … Click- BANG! …”

Nothing still. No movement, no nothing. Thoughts were running through Loona's head as she became mildly concerned for his well-being; Was he hurt? Did something take him? Had he fallen somewhere? No.. no come on, he would've called out if he needed help.. But he would've responded if he wasn't hurt-.

Suddenly, off into the distance through the trees, the hellhound heard a faint sound off into the distance. Her ears stood upright, pointing into the direction of this ever-so faint break in the usual sounds of the bushland. Loona peers off into the direction, trying to make out what it was… it was the sound of distant footsteps and talking, perhaps more than one person.

Loona's heart skips a beat, perhaps realizing who this seemingly small group of people could be; it couldn't've been that group of idiots Jim had a near run-in with, was it? The thought slightly terrified her; "Oh shit," she exclaimed in a hushed tone. The hellhound was definitely awake this time as she made her way in that direction with a light sprint, her torch in hand, though attempting to be as quiet as she could possibly be with the foliage crunching under her feet.

She held the light to the ground, though just bright enough to illuminate the area in front of her. Loona hears the noises growing louder and louder as she begins to see a few other lights in between another smaller clearing which she was fast approaching; it was torches, perhaps two or three of them. Loona's eyes widen; "What the fuck is this," she whispers harshly through her breath as she finally approaches the clearing, hiding amongst a dense patch of foliage, at last able to make out the scene clearly.

There was a group made up of two men and a woman, all three of them looking like complete lowlifes. One man was just about six

feet tall with a balding head and sickly-looking facial hair, the other one being on the fatter side of things with a mullet, while the woman was just under her taller apparent boyfriend; Her facial features were gaunt, her hair wild and thinning, obviously not one to keep up appearances. The balding leader of the group had a machete gripped in his hands, the tip of the blade aiming at a fourth person in attendance; it didn't take long for Loona to realize who the figure with his back up against the tree was, his hands up in a surrendering stance.

Her eyes widen in realization; "Oh fuck no, Jim…" she gasps quietly, listening in to the scene the best she could.

"Y- You're a bunch of fucking psychos," Jim bellows as he was sweating bullets; "All of this shit over me running into you cunts in town!?"

"Don't talk to my Richie like that, you sick dog-CUNT," the sickly-looking woman slurs with a heavy drunken-Australian accent, her voice grating and croaky; "You shouldn't be out here in the first place looking at OUR business!"

"AGAIN, what fucking business!?" Jim was trying his best to keep his composure, the country yokel's voice shaky and obviously terrified for his life.

"The body hidden near the tunnels-" the woman perhaps mistakenly explains through her audible intoxication, which was met with fuming anger from the apparent leader of the group.

Body? What now?

“Oh for FUCK sakes, Mandy, did you have to TELL HIM,” the balding machete-wielding lowlife bellowed as he lowered his grip on the machete, peering at the sickly-looking woman with a scolding gaze. It was obvious, too, that the machete-wielder was wildly uncoordinated with how he waved it around, nearly hitting the fatter man’s arm.

“T- the fucking what,” Jim stutters through bated breath, trying his hardest to inch away from the blade just inches from his face.

“Shut your mouth, ya mutt,” the stocky mullet-haired man interrupted abruptly; “Soon as we’re done gutting you, we’ll find your little mate back at your camp there, hm? How’s that sound?”

“I really don’t think that’s a good idea, mate. You sure you want to find her,” Jim asks, trying to put on a brave face, as the fatter lowlife now held a pistol in his hands which he cocked back, preparing to aim it at their captive.

“We’ll make that call,” the mullet-head assures as he raises the pistol directly at Jim’s head.

Before anything more could be done, a low, guttural sound could be heard emanating from somewhere within the trees from behind them. The three lowlifes all turn around, trying to figure out where the sound was coming from. The sickly-looking deranged woman, apparently “Mandy”, was the first to realize that emerging slowly from the darkness was a pair of eyes. Not only that, but whatever

had those eyes was making the most ferocious growl she had ever heard in her life.

“Richie, R-Richie-.. fuck- Richie, look,” Mandy spluttered through terrified short and sharp breaths, tugging Richie’s white tank-top and pointing to where the six-foot silhouette of a beastly wolf-like bipedal was emerging slowly from the darkness with the most menacing snarl. It was hunched over and obviously prepared to strike, its scarlet red eyes piercing and beyond terrifying, glaring at all of them with pure, unfiltered hatred and its claws unsheathed, appearing sharper than anything else imaginable.

“She’s found you,” Jim simply states from behind them.

Suddenly, the hellhound rushes forward with remarkable speed with a large loose branch in her grip, smacking it across the head of the machete-wielding man, splintering across his skull! The man cried out in pain as he collapsed to the floor, holding the top of his head in pure agony as the hellhound then went after the fat gunman who was just about to adjust his aim as his hands shook violently in terror!

Before he could even get the chance to shoot, the beast swiftly grabs his arm and tugs outwards with brute force, breaking and dislocating perhaps every bone in his forearm and hand and digging into his skin with those razor-sharp claws, the fat man’s guttural screams in terror and pain drowning out every other sound in the immediate area!

Then came the deranged woman, “Mandy”, who was screaming on the top of her lungs, petrified of this horrific beast as she cowered all wretched and hunched over behind a tree! She clambered

around Loona to grab the gun that had fallen by the wayside, trying to load it! Through her horrified unfocused state, she accidentally pulled the trigger as she tried to grab it, ending up shooting herself in the chest which made her seize up and collapse to the ground! Loona realized that perhaps the job was done for her as the life faded out of “Mandy’s” feral eyes.

Loona turned around to see “Richie” try to charge clumsily at her with the machete which didn’t end well as she promptly lurched to the side and kicked his back with unmatched strength and force, allowing him to stumble and fall head-first into a ditch, an audible “CRACK!” being heard as he fell limp.

All that was left alive was the fatter man with the mullet, covered in the cuts and bruising of his earlier altercation. Loona darts her beyond menacing glare at the wounded criminal, slowly approaching him as he holds his obviously crippled left arm which was bleeding from the deep gashes of Loona’s knife-like claws. The fat man tries to scream even more at the wolf-like bipedal approaching him, only to make pathetic-sounding whimpers as he tries to get up from his humiliating crouched position. Loona slowly picks him up by his face, bringing him in close with a huge sharp-toothed snarl, a ferocious growl emanating from her mouth.

“You wanna try that again, you FAT FUCK,” Loona growled through clenched teeth, staring directly into his eyes with a look that could absolutely kill.

The stocky gunman whimpered, still trying to hold his broken arm. He was hyper-ventilating, obviously petrified and the color completely drained from his face. He whimpered a little bit longer, but it was obvious that the terror of whatever-the-fuck this creature was was too much for him as he suddenly fell limp, slumping away

from Loona's grip and falling with a heavy "thump!" - a heart attack.

Loona looked around the area, picking up her torch and shining it around; "Jim! Dude, where are you? Jim!"

"Over here," Jim calls out as he emerges from behind a tree, panting as he comes back out, obviously a little shaken; "I-I'm okay… thank- hah-.. thank goodness you came when you did."

She jogs over to him, shining the light on his chest so as not to blind him. She looks him over, concerned for his well-being; "Are you alright? D-did they hurt you in any way?"

"Nah.. nah, n-not yet at least," he spluttered, still trying to catch his breath.

Loona huffs from the adrenaline rush as she shone the light at the bodies around them; "So what the fuck happened? How'd they get to you in the first place?"

Jim fixes up his clothing and runs his fingers through his hair before responding; "I was just up to take a piss a good couple of feet away from camp near this tree and I hear a gun being cocked from behind me. They told me to surrender myself which I did; I didn't have any other choice."

Loona kicks dirt at one of the bodies with a sickened grunt;

“Fucking psychotic sacks of shit. Wait a minute, that bitch said something about tunnels… you think she meant the tunnels at that abandoned mining camp?”

Jim raises his brow in realization, looking to the west in the general direction of the abandoned site; “Only one way to find out… what’s gonna happen to these three?”

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll get Blitz to deal with them,” Loona reassures as they head towards the shallowest spot in the river to cross over, making a beeline to the abandoned mining settlement. Deep down, both Jim and Loona dreaded what they were going to possibly find; what sickening discovery they would come across, created by the hands of the scum-of-the-earth trio.

They crossed the river and off into the direction of the abandoned mining site, the moon reflecting enough of their surroundings that sometimes the torch wasn’t needed. At this point, Loona was once again getting tired, though her earlier adrenaline rush kept her awake. After a couple of minutes, the two of them arrive at the clearing of the abandoned site, finding the two mineshaft tunnels awaiting them just as they had left them.

Loona hesitates before speaking as they thought about their plan of “attack”: “Look, Jim… I know this sounds callous, but I really don’t think there’s anything for us to see here. It’s how we’ll expect it to be - a pile of dead bodies or some fucked-up shit like that, I mean come on.”

Jim shakes his head; “But what if there’s a survivor? They were mentioning something about “finishing the job”. There’s got to be someone else at least alive here, you know?”

Loona huffs, feeling her fatigue slowly creep back; “But they said “bodies”; whatever or whoever was there, they’re already dead. I’m sorry, Jim, but… fuck-, all that’s there is a few mangled corp…”

Suddenly, a very faint sound emanates from within the open shaft, just sounding off for a split second before dissipating. Jim gestures for Loona to keep it down as they both peer into the tunnel, wide-eyed and focused.

“…I’m going in,” Jim announces.

Loona looks slightly baffled; “What? What if it’s a trap?”

“I got you, don’t I,” Jim replies as he turns around with a concerned look on his face, wanting ever-so-desperately to find whoever could be still alive in there.

Loona hesitates for a few seconds, weighing out her options. After shifting her unfocused, thoughtful gaze a bit, she slowly nods and shines the torch into the darkest pit of the tunnel; “Yes you do, but stay close; none of us want to get hurt here.”

Jim responds with a thumbs up as they slowly make their way in. Their footsteps echoed through the tunnel and their torches shone, the both of them hearing the faint and sporadic whimpering getting louder and louder. Jim groups closer to Loona with the Webley Revolver in his hand just in case as they come up to a little ante-chamber at the end of a right-angled bend where the whimpering

suddenly stopped, obviously reacting to their presence.

It was now or never; enter into the ante-chamber and confront whoever or whatever was here, or turn back and leave whoever was here behind to succumb. Jim looks at Loona who was behind him, only to be met with a slight nod from the 'hound to tell him that she was ready. Jim nods in return as he turns back around and walks to the mouth of the ante-chamber, shining his light inside. Shortly after doing so, he freezes as his eyes widen before putting his right hand up to his mouth, his thumb under his chin and his middle and index finger on his lips.

Loona becomes concerned as she waits behind him, watching as Jim leans up on the walls of the mineshaft around them; "What? What is it? … Jim, what is.."

Jim slowly turns his head towards Loona as he answers with disbelief; "There's a kid… L-Loona, there's… there's a kid in there…"

Loona's eyes shift with a squint, processing the information; "What, dead?"

Jim doesn't respond as he looks towards Loona with disbelieving eyes before he shakes his head ever-so-slightly; "No. She's alive, Loona… the-the kid's alive."

"Alive? What," Loona asks in bewilderment as she rounds the corner to confirm it herself, shining her light into the space before her.

What greets her is a terribly upsetting scene; in the corner of the dark, cold antechamber was a girl, perhaps no older than ten years old, dressed in a dirty gray shirt and blue trousers and a pair of running shoes. She was covered head to-toe in dirt with her brunette hair in a mess. She glares at the terrifying wolf-like creature in front of her, her dirt-ridden face stained with tears - it was obvious that the poor thing was terrified. What was most heartbreaking, however, was the two bodies that accompanied the girl; a man and a woman, presumably her parents.

Loona's heart sinks, really not sure of how to react to the scene before her, quite literally at a loss for words. Sure, she had seen some really fucked up shit in her life, but this… this really took the cake with how insanely sad it all was. She turns back towards Jim who was behind her, looking at the hellhound for a hint of direction on what to do next. There was an uncomfortably long silence, the two of them really not sure of how to approach this. After a good ten seconds of procrastination, Loona cautiously turns back around and begins to speak:

"Uh… h-hey there-"

Suddenly the girl whimpers and tries to back away into the rock all behind her! Jim intervenes by emerging from behind Loona's tall silhouette to calm the poor thing down; "Hey, hey, shhh- It's okay! She's- we're not going to hurt you!"

The poor girl whimpers a little more before her mouth quivers, trying to say something; "S-sprichst du deutsch? D-deutsch..?"

“Oh shit, she’s… she’s German,” Jim informs Loona, briefly looking back in her direction; “Do you know any German?”

Loona stares at the girl with pity and baffled confusion in her eyes before turning back towards Jim; “What? No, no I don’t… shit, I’m… this is fucked up…”

Suddenly the girl interrupts their train of thought, trying to speak again; “D-don’t hurt me, please,” she whimpers in slightly broken English, obviously directed at Loona.

Loona was really put on the spot now. Her reclusive instincts wanted this to be none of her concern, and she’d just go home and discard this whole situation without a care in the world… but she couldn’t. She couldn’t just leave an innocent kid in perhaps the most pitiful situation she had ever seen an innocent kid in. After running her hand down her face briefly to compose herself, she slowly crouches down with her hands in front of her and lowered towards the ground.

“Hey, kid, look-… I’m not going to hurt you, o-okay,” Loona stumbles over her words - she was really not great with kids after-all.

“Y-you talk..,” the kid trembles with disbelief, still crouched in the corner of the antechamber near the two bodies.

“Y-yeah… I do talk,” the hellhound confirms with a nod as she tries to find the right words to say, understanding the fear she must be feeling; “We’re here to help you. Those bad people? They’re gone.

They won't hurt you again… okay?"

The kid chokes up a little bit, still scared of the crouched wolf-like being in front of her until she composed herself and opened up; "T-they killed.. t-they killed mama and-.. and papa," she whimpers as her voice cracks from her sorrow.

"I know, I know," Loona tries to soothe the kid to the best of her ability; "But we'll get you out of here, okay? You don't have to suffer anymore. We'll… we'll protect you."

"They're completely gone, kid, trust us," Jim interjects from the left of the hellhound, shining the light away from the kid's tear-ridden face.

The girl's lip quivers a little bit before she looks towards the two bodies; "C-can I say goodbye first…?"

Loona's eyes shift, careful on what to say next; "…Of course you can," she says quietly, still crouched down as she tries to keep her composure.

The poor girl slowly crawls over to the two bodies and gives them both a soft hug as tears fall from her eyes. She whimpers a bit more before she speaks to them one last time; "D…Du bist jetzt im Himmel…"

Loona rubs the space in between her eyes as Jim stood there,

absolutely stunned and saddened at this entire situation. After a couple more seconds, Loona reaches out her hand towards the kid slowly with hesitation, careful not to fuck this up, making sure that her claws were not unsheathed; “You ready now, kid?”

The kid gently nods as she slowly makes her way over, examining Loona’s hand for a minute before she grabs it gently. Although this entire situation was completely out of the ‘hound’s depth, Loona was quite impressed with how she was handling it. She slowly gets up from her crouched position, though still bent her back downwards a bit so she could still hold onto the kid’s hand.

“Alright, let’s go,” Jim solemnly announces as he looks at the bodies for a few seconds more, sadness overcoming the atmosphere around them.

The little group of three make their way back out of the mineshaft tunnels, not a word spoken until they at last emerge from the darkest depths of that damned hole to be met with the moon shining the space around them and the sound of crickets chirping somewhere in the bushland. They stop at the mouth of the mine shaft tunnel to think of their next plan of “attack”.

“Fuck…” Loona simply says, though not too loudly so the poor girl couldn’t hear it; “What… what do we do from here?”

Jim rubs his chin a bit as he looks back down into the tunnel they had just emerged from, before he sighs pitifully and turns back towards Loona with an idea; “We’ll, uh… we’ll head back to camp and pack up. I think what we should do is go home and sort this out in the morning... I’ll take her down to the police station and report the scene, and uh… yeah, we’ll head home first and get this kid

cleaned up."

Loona nods as she was still bent down, trying to hold onto the kid's hand to the best of her ability - if Blitz or anyone else had been there with them, they would have a field day about how "Loona was going soft" or some shit like that, though in all honestly she no longer cared; this was an innocent, defenseless kid who had something unspeakable happen to her.

"Agh- hey uh, kid," Loona winces as her back begins to strain; "I-I don't think I can bend down and hold your hand any longer. Do you want to, uh… damnit, I can't believe I'm about to say this, but do you.. want me to hold you in-.. in my arms?"

The kid thinks about it for a few seconds before looking back up at Loona with a small nod.

Loona gives off a grunt; "Okay, here we go," she concedes, in disbelief that she was even doing this as she picks up the kid and holds her close and snug, making sure to have a firm hold on the kid in her arms. She then turns her gaze briefly to Jim; "No mention of this to Blitz, okay?"

"Of course," Jim half-smiles, "I know he'd give you pain about all this."

Loona half-smiles in return, thankful for Jim's understanding. She looks down at the kid in her arms as they make their way through the bushland back towards camp; "You okay there, kid?"

The dirt-ridden kid nods as she looks ahead, her face at last drying from her tears; “Mhm.. Y- you’re very fluffy.”

“Oh? Am I now,” Loona replies, slightly surprised at the remark.

The kid nods slowly as she rests in Loona’s arms, exhausted from her ordeal; “Y-yeah.. You are a bit scary, though.”

The hellhound gently pulls the sides of her black jacket around the kid to keep her sheltered with a resemblance of safety; “Heh- I know, I know, but you’ve got nothing to fear from me, I promise. Ask this big guy next to me,” she gestures to Jim with a teasing smile, trying to comfort the kid in her arms with some sort of humor.

“She’s right, you know? She looks tough and mean, not to mention act like it half the time, but she’ll protect you,” Jim concedes to the girl as they were halfway to their destination.

The child doesn’t answer, still obviously stunned by the traumatic experience as she huddled closer into Loona’s arms, a few more tears forming in her eyes. Sure, the hellhound may not be entirely used to close physical contact such as this, but at the end of the day this was an innocent girl that needed her help, so she chose to just suck it up.

After walking a good couple of minutes through the dense bushland, they at last arrive at the river dividing “Coachman’s

Gully.” Loona holds onto the kid tightly as they cross the shallow rock path that poked out of the water, then at last arriving in front of the canvas tents where all of their belongings were awaiting their return.

“Alright, uh.. I’ll pack everything away… I think it’s best you take care of the kid,” Jim suggests to Loona who at last sets the girl down onto her feet.

Loona, however, hesitates at this notion as she asks the girl to stay put, coming over to Jim in a hushed tone; “Take care of her? Jim, I.. I’m not good with kids. I can be moody and the last thing I want is that kid getting on my nerves and I end up traumatizing her more; she’s already weary about my appearance, and for good reason, I guess.”

“Alright, if you don’t think you can do it. I guess then we’ll both look out for her as we pack this shit away,” Jim concedes, fully understanding Loona’s reservations.

Jim begins dismantling his tent after Loona agrees to the negotiated new proposal, following the packing-away procedure with her own gear to the best of her ability. The girl, meanwhile, sits down near the fire pit and looks up at the sky with a somber look and small tears in her eyes, the poor thing’s eyes still sore from presumably hours upon hours of crying out for someone to come rescue her.

It takes a bit of time, but after a good couple of minutes of fumbling around in the dark and gathering all of their belongings, it was nearly all loaded at the back and ready to go, spare the fire pit and Loona’s bag. The hellhound searches the space around her as a final check to see if anything was missing, only to hear the familiar sad

whimper of the kid who was now sitting underneath a tree with her knees tucked in her arms, her silhouette illuminated by the moonlight. Loona stares at the dirt and dust-ridden kid, disgusted by the terrible situation the twerp had been thrown into.

Loona was conflicted, her scarlet eyes shifting in thought; Should she try comforting her again? Would it even work out like it did when she carried her here? Surely she wouldn't be fucking stupid enough to slip out with something that would make it even worse? What if she fucked it up and lost her patience?

"Fuck it, here goes nothing," Loona whispers under her breath as she slowly approaches the kid, careful not to freak her out as she crouched down slightly; "Hey, uh.. twerp?"

The kid slowly looks up from her huddled posture, staring into Loona's eyes. She lurches back a little bit, still scared of the hellhound's towering height.

Loona crouches down more as she raises her hands; "Hey- hey, I'm not going to hurt you, I- uh, I promise," Loona whispers to the kid, trying her absolute best to find the right words.

Although understandably still frightened, the girl slowly comes out of her huddled position and pays full attention to the 'hound in front of her, still sitting in the dirt.

"You okay there," Loona carefully asks after thinking on what to say next.

The kid slowly shakes her head, wiping some tears from her eyes.

Loona huffs softly as she decides to sit down slowly in front of the kid; “Look, twerp, I-… I’m real sorry this happened to you.”

“No, no…” the kid replies; “Please don’t say sorry… it’s not your fault.”

Loona bows her head to think on what to say next for a second before looking back up; “What’s your name?”

“…Agatha…”

“Agatha..,” Loona repeats back with a slight smile, still trying to comfort the kid; “That’s a nice name.”

“..Thanks,” Agatha timidly responds, examining Loona’s tall silhouette as she slowly begins to trust the ‘hound in front of her more; “…Not everyone thinks that. Some kids think it’s ugly.”

“Well guess what, they can go fu- uh, I-I mean they can get lost,” Loona remarks, just catching her tongue before she could swear.

Agatha looks down in the dirt, poking at the ground with that sad look still in her eyes before she looks back up; “What’s your name?”

“I’m Loona,” the hellhound responds as she puts her hand on her chest as a gesture to introduce herself.

“Huh… I like it; it’s pretty.”

“Aw thanks, kiddo,” Loona smiles gently as she crosses her legs to make herself more comfortable; “…do you have anyone we can take you to?”

Agatha’s eyes begin to well up with tears again as she shakes her head gently; “N-no…”

Loona’s heart sinks a bit; “Anyone overseas back at home?”

The kid nods her head this time; “I got my big sister in Hamburg.”

Loona nods her head in acknowledgement, not sure of what to say next as she looks up into the starry night above. Fortunately for her, Loona didn’t need to make the decision for the next question as the kid was the one to break the silence, whilst Jim at last finished packing everything away:

“L-Loona?”

“Hm?”

“…I don’t know if you will allow me to, but… c-can I have a hug?”

Loona hesitates, thinking about it for a second; she really wasn’t used to giving out hugs, nor was she used to accepting them, besides from Blitz (and even then, she was still getting used to accepting his). Loona huffs gently before she nods; “Sure, c’mere,” the hellhound replies with a small, soft smile as she opens her arms out for a hug.

The kid slowly gets up and walks over to Loona, coming up close to her before suddenly wrapping her small arms around the hellhound, burying her face into her rescuer’s shoulder. Cautiously, Loona wraps her arms around the kid and brings her in close, patting her gently on the back of her head as the hellhound hears the poor thing begin to cry a little.

“Hey now, sh-sh-, it’s okay - you’re safe now,” Loona reassures the kid with a quiet voice, at last getting the hang of comforting the poor thing.

Loona continues to hold the poor kid in her embrace, feeling the twerp at last calm down and rest. This comforting hug lasted for half-a-minute before Loona let go of Agatha and looked at her; “There, you better?”

“A little… t-thank you.”

Loona smiles in response as she hears Jim come up from behind

her; “Alright, we’re all set. You two ready to go,” he asks in a quiet voice.

“I think so. You ready, twerp,” Loona asks the kid still in her arms.

The kid nods gently through her exhaustion with a small yawn as Loona gets up to follow Jim to the Ute, the rescued kid following closely behind. Loona opens the passenger’s side door and lets the kid get in first to fit in the middle, making sure the kid is comfortable as the hellhound gets in afterwards and closes the door, shoving her personal bag at her feet. After making sure everything was all set, Jim turned the ignition and started his old workhorse, turned on the lights with high-beams on and put the Ute in drive before at last driving down the dirt path back out onto the main road towards home.

Agatha looks up at the cowboy-looking young man to her left and the tall wolf-like woman to her right, truly thankful that they had found her when they did. She yawns a bit, resting back onto the soft varnished seat.

“Getting tired there,” Loona asks, looking down at the small twerp to her left.

“Mhm…” Agatha nods as she looks up at the hellhound with tired eyes.

“You can sleep if you’d like, matey, you need it,” Jim butts in as he indicates right, at last speeding up as the Ute was now on the open road back to Morrisvale.

The poor kid nods as she gets herself comfortable, leaning up next to Loona and nestled up to her black jacket. The hellhound is slightly surprised at this for a brief second, looking down at the kid next to her before giving off a small sigh, letting the poor thing use her right arm as a headrest. As an extra gesture, Loona carefully allows her tail to curl up around the kid as a makeshift blanket in a very rare gesture. Agatha reacts to this by shuffling down a little into Loona's tail fur as she, at long last, after so much suffering and misery, went off to sleep.

Loona looks down at the sleeping girl in pity and sorrow for the poor twerp's devastating loss before she looks out to the road ahead. The drive back was quiet and peaceful before Jim opted to break it with a comment:

"Look at you, Loona - that's really sweet."

Loona turns her exhausted gaze towards Jim; "What is?"

Jim smiles a little, finding Loona's mercy for the kid very bittersweet; "You, looking after this kid - I told you that you had a conscience."

Loona grunts a little; "I wasn't just going to leave the poor thing out here to die. Of course I'm an asshole - not a heartless monster."

"I know, I know," Jim assures; "I'm just saying that you did good back there; you're handling this well."

Loona looks down at the kid nestled up around her tail as she exhales through her nose; “Hm.. I didn’t know I had it in me.”

“Ah, well, you’ve learnt something about yourself, haven’t you,” Jim suggests, looking straight ahead to the road.

Loona raises her brow, knowing that perhaps the “country yokel’s” conviction was correct. The hellhound yawns before shutting her eyes, at last getting some proper sleep as they make their way home, the Ute’s headlights bouncing off scattered trees, fence-posts and open grassy plains through the pitch-darkness.

…

Loona is awoken to the familiar feel of the Ute pulling up into the boundaries of Jim’s property, opening her eyes and grunting to find herself within the very familiar garage, Jim’s carpentry equipment gathered on the back wall. She stretches a bit before carefully opening the passenger’s side door, getting out slowly so that the kid next to her wouldn’t be jolted out of her sleep. The kid, however, didn’t wake up and continued to doze even as Loona gently pulled her tail away from her. Jim gets out of the driver’s side and carefully closes the door behind him, making his way to the front door of his house to unlock it.

The hellhound carefully reaches in to pick up the kid, bringing her in close and carrying the poor thing into the house; “Where should I put her?”

“Put her in the spare bedroom maybe,” Jim yawns as he checks the time; “1:15AM,” the clock that hung on the wall read.

Loona opens the door to the spare bedroom with the kid still snug in her arms before walking in quietly to lay the poor thing down, making sure she had something to rest her head on. For a moment, Loona looks down at the kid, concerned about what would happen to her from here on. To look out for the young soul, Loona decides to sit next to her on a small lounge chair adjacent to the bed. She stares at the kid, making sure she would be okay, much like how, say, a dog would watch out after her young. She looks down at her phone as the glare strained her tired eyes, scrolling through a few things before shutting it off and deciding to let the desire to sleep take over.

…

Loona wakes up with a tremendous awakening groan, feeling the morning light hit her in the face through the window just above the bed. She looks at her phone to reveal that the time was now 7:00AM. She looks back down at the kid who was still sleeping away, having shifted a little in the covers through the night.

Loona softly smiles before getting up with a light heave from the chair, walking over to place the back of her hand on the kid’s forehead, wiping some of the dirt and dust away from her face. She exhales through her nose and smiles; “Hang in there, you little twerp.”

She makes her way out the door, leaving it open as she makes her way to the kitchen to get something to eat as well as some water, because bloody hell, was she thirsty. She walks into the kitchen via

the living room to be met with Jim who had two cups of coffee in his hands.

“Morning, Loona,” he greets, handing the mug over to the hellhound.

“Morning to you. Thanks for the coffee,” Loona nods as she takes a sip, careful not to burn her tongue.

“So, I guess you’re heading home soon, hey,” Jim asks as he sips his own.

“What? You want to kick me out, do you,” Loona jokes.

Jim exhales through his nose and smiles; “You know I don’t mean it like that, you idiot.”

“Of course I do, you dumbass,” Loona chuckles; “But, yeah; I’ll leave in the next hour or so, gotta clean up the remains of those fucking oxygen-stealers back there.”

“Yeah, nah, fair enough,” Jim concedes; “But despite the… fucked situation here, did you enjoy that?”

Loona smiles as she pats Jim on the side of his forearm; “You know what? I really did. As I said earlier, you’re fun in a really boring kind of way. Me, personally, I’d do it again - well, minus those hick

motherfuckers last night."

"Ah, I'm glad I could entertain," Jim nods as they both walk back out through the hallway and onto the veranda; "I'll take the kid into town to the Rozzers, tell them to visit the scene down there at the mining camp."

"Got it," Loona replies as they stand in silence finishing the last bits of their coffee; "I'll just call Blitz to tell him about this, give his ass a head's up."

Jim waves for Loona to go ahead as she loops around to the other side of the veranda to call her dad. She calls his number before holding it up to her ear, hearing the phone buzz a couple of times before Blitz at last picks up:

"Hi, sweetie! How's my Loonie doing?"

"Not too bad, dad - hey, look, I need you to come over here, we got a situation," Loona explains, getting straight to the point as she sips her morning beverage.

"Oh fuck, what's happened," Blitz groans, probably not in the mood to deal with something like this on a Sunday.

"Okay, so last night Jim got captured by these braindead hick oxygen-thieves and I saved his life. Turns out they killed this kid's parents and left the kid alive with the bodies in this abandoned

mine we found," Loona explains in detail.

"Uff- fuck," Blitz expresses; "Did you make mince-meat of these hicks?"

Loona snickers; "Well, one tripped and broke his neck after I shoved him, the other one shot herself with the handgun they had, and the fat fuck ended up dying of a heart attack after I nearly ripped his arm off."

Loona hears Blitz heartily cackle from the other end of the phone; "OHOHO! That's my Loonie! Alright, meet me back at the apartment, I'll see if M&M can help us out with this."

"All good, I'll see you soon," Loona finishes as she hangs up the call, rounding back around to where Jim was; "Alright, I guess that's me going now."

"Ah yeah, no worries," Jim nods; "Well look, thanks for stopping by, it's been fun chilling with you-"

"Y-you're going..?" Suddenly, a familiar smaller voice appears from behind the both of them in the hallway. They both turn around to see the poor soul, Agatha, rubbing her eyes from sleep after having apparently washed her face with water.

Jim and Loona both look at the kid, with Loona the first to speak up; "Yeah, I got to go, kid. I've had enough adventure for one day,

you know?"

"Okay," the kid replies, yawning a little bit; "T-thank you for saving me."

Loona smiles a little upon hearing this; "Don't mention it," she says as she decides to crouch down to the kid's height; "Can you do something for me?"

The kid nods as she approaches the hellhound in front of her, listening in.

"I need you to be strong through this, okay? Will you do that for me," Loona requests to the kid.

Agatha nods her head slowly, staring into Loona's eyes; "I'll try."

Loona smiles warmly in return; "Hey, that's all you can do, and that's okay," she assures the kid as she opens her arms up to embrace the kid before she finally left.

Without much hesitation, the poor soul comes up to Loona and wraps her arms around the wolf-like being with the hellhound gently patting the kid on the back before letting go and standing back up.

"I'll see you around, Jim," Loona finally says as she shakes Jim's

hand and brings him in close to pat him firmly on the back.

“No worries,” Jim cackles as he waved goodbye to the hellhound who was now making her way back down off the veranda with her personal bag.

“I’ve got your details, so I’ll probably text you later to see how the twerp there’s going,” Loona calls out as she makes her way down the gravel and dirt pathway towards the tree line on the other side of the road.

“All good! Catch you on,” Jim calls out as he waves her off, watching as she finally vanishes into the bushland.

“Where’s she going,” Agatha curiously asks as she watches Loona leave.

“Oh, just home,” Jim smiles as the kid goes to stand next to him.

“Does she live in the forest,” The kid further goes on to question with ponderous eyes.

“Yeah, something like that,” Jim responds as he clears his throat; “Now, I’ll take you into the police station in town and they’ll help you from there; that okay?”

The kid nods slowly as she follows Jim inside to get prepared to

head out.

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- = End = -